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MOSAICS.



HERE are few objects of art more entirely novel and interesting to Americans than the Roman and Florentine mosaics. This is one of the few branches of art in which modern skill and taste have shown themselves equal, and, indeed, superior to the ancient. The Florentine mosaics in hard stones are almost exclusively of modern origin. We allude of course to the employment of various natural minerals cut and inlaid in a solid basis of black

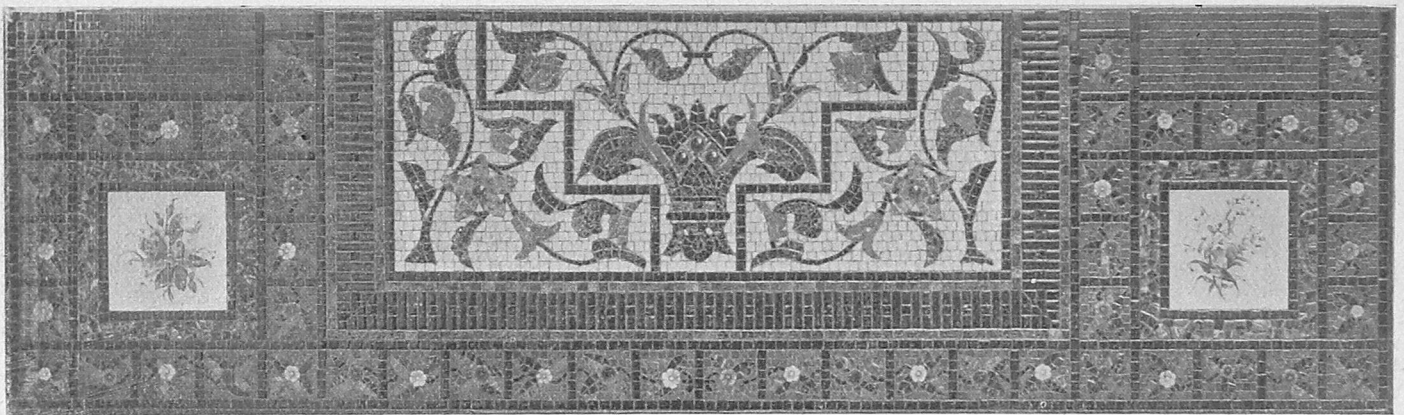
or other marble, in such a manner as to produce the effect of a fine painting. The ancients were well skilled in a method of their own for producing mosaic pictures on walls and pavements, but their mode of the mosaic art was, as we shall presently show, quite distinct from the modern *pietre dure*, or hard stone mosaics. As this art in all its branches is quite unknown in the United States, we propose to give some account of it for the information of the general reader.

Mosaics are imitations of paintings and of natural objects, by means of colored stones, pieces of glass, and even of wood of different colors, cemented together with much art. The Italian *musaico* and the French *mosaïque* originated from the word *musaicon* of the Byzantine Greeks, who reintroduced the art into Italy in the 13th century, after it had been driven out in the fifth century by the distracted state of the country during the fall of the Roman Empire. Little is known of its early history. It probably originated in the East, was improved by the Greeks, and was conveyed to Italy during the time of Sylla, a century before the Christian Era. Some writers have amused themselves

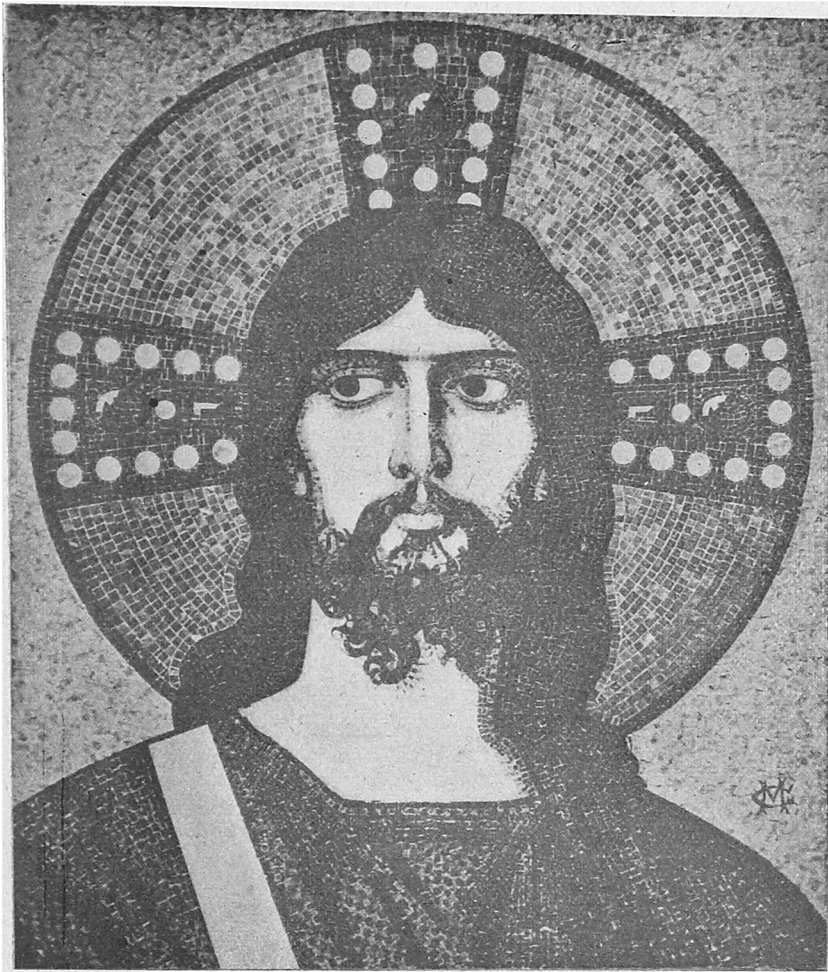
by tracing the origin of this art to Moses, and from him its name. A more probable conjecture regarding the origin of the name is that which refers it to the Greek word *μουσειον*, (museum) the original meaning of which was a grotto consecrated to the *Muses*. From the circumstance that mosaic work was often used for the decoration of the interior of grottoes, the name of these rural retreats came to be applied naturally enough to the work itself!

In Italy and indeed in all countries occupied by the ancient Romans, many pavements and floors ornamented with mosaic work have been discovered. More ancient, probably, than these, are the mosaic pavements discovered in the ruins of Carthage. The ancient Roman mosaic was formed almost exclusively out of small square bits of various colored marbles, serpentine, porphyries, and other colored stones set in a lime cement. These stones were arranged in various regular patterns to form fretted borders—white and black being frequently the sole colors—while the central space was decorated either with geometrical figures, or with copies of various natural objects. The Romans were, however, by no means confined to the use of fragments of natural stones to produce their mosaics, but they also employed brilliantly colored enamels similar to those in use in the mosaics of modern Rome.

Among the most celebrated of the ancient Roman mosaics which have come down to our times is "PLINY'S DOVES" in the Capitol Museum at Rome. This exquisite work is very perfectly preserved and represents four doves standing on the lip of a vase of water; one is drinking, while the others are pluming their feathers. A beautiful border surrounds the composition, which was designed and used as a pavement in one of the apartments of a Roman house. It was found in Hadrian's villa at Tivoli, in 1737, by Cardinal Furietti. Natural stones alone are used in its composition, and these are so small that 760 have been counted in a single square inch of the surface. This is believed by antiquaries to be the same work of art which so excited the admiration of Pliny that he describes it in his 35th book. He says, "There is at Pergamos a wonderful specimen in mosaic of a dove drinking and darkening the water with the shadow of her head, while on the lip of the vase others are pluming themselves." This



A MODERN TILE MOSAIC.



"THE CHRIST." AN ENAMEL MOSAIC FROM THE PAINTING BY MEBERT.

beautiful antique is so constantly reproduced in modern copies, both in mosaic and in sculpture, that it is probably familiar to all.

The excavations at Pompeii have brought to light numerous examples of ancient Roman mosaics, and some of them are exquisitely beautiful, both in execution and design. Such is the noble composition known as the "BATTLE PIECE," found in the house of the Fawn, and now in the Museum at Naples. It contains over twenty figures of mounted horsemen in close conflict—some are fallen and trampled underfoot, while others are fiercely engaged hand to hand in deadly combat. The gay costumes of the warriors—the polished circular shields in which are seen reflections of the combatants—and especially the ancient war chariot with four horses abreast, and containing apparently the leader of the onset with his charioteer—all combine to produce a most spirited picture, and to convey a vivid impression of the arms and mode of ancient warfare. The figures in this remarkable mosaic are nearly of life size, and the colors are produced by glass enamels as well as by natural stones.

The chained dog with the inscription "Cave Canem" (Beware the dog), is a most life-like and startling mosaic which formed the floor at the entrance of the house of the Edile, Glaucus. Another well-known and beautiful example from the same city, is a casket of jewels, from the open top of which two doves are drawing a necklace of pearls. This last-named mosaic has been suffered to remain where it was found in the pavement of one of

the apartments in the so called house of Sallust. It is formed entirely of small squares of various natural stones.

The only representative of the ancient Roman mosaic pavement found in Modern Italy is the Scagliola, in which irregular shaped fragments of various sizes of colored marble are imbedded in a calcareous cement, sometimes in symmetrical patterns, and afterwards polished down to an even surface. Such are the common floors of modern Italian houses—so well suited to the climate and habits of the country.

It has been suggested that the mosaic pavements of the Romans were formed by arranging the separate pieces in an inverted position on a flat surface upon which the design had been traced in outline, and then covering the back or underside of the whole system of pieces with the cement which was to secure them in place. Afterward the whole mass being turned over and secured in its destined position, a perfectly level surface could be secured without the trouble of grinding or polishing down the irregularities which would certainly exist if the mosaic had been formed in the position in which it was to remain, owing to the impossibility of inserting such minute fragments in a soft and yielding basis to a perfectly uniform level. This explanation is probably the true one.

THE MODERN ROMAN MOSAICS are exclusively of glass enamels. The preparation of the pastes or colored glasses (always opaque), forms a separate branch of industry; they are made of very fusible materials, colored by oxydes of metals and tempered to every possible shade of color. It is said that the magazines of the papal manufactory of mosaics in the Vatican, embrace not less than 10,000 shades of the various colors.

These enamels are drawn into rods or sticks like sealing-wax, of various sizes, according to the work to be done, and are skilfully arranged in a series of compartments to facilitate the artist in the rapid prosecution of his work.

